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SUBJECT: SEECF FOREIGN MINISTERS MOVE POSITIVELY ON STABILITY PACT
TRANSITION

Ref: A) Zagreb 202

B) Brussels 194

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¶1. (SBU) Summary and comment: The March 2 SEECF Foreign Ministers meeting in Zagreb saw positive movement on the Stability Pact transition process to a new SEECF-led regional cooperation framework. The Ministers approved a methodology for selecting both the new Secretary General and the location of the proposed Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). SEECF PolDir's will meet again later in March in tandem with the joint Stability Pact-SEECF Institutional Working Group (IWG) to hash out details of the RCC founding charter and to continue preparations for reviewing the prospective nominees for the RCC location and SG position. Final recommended texts will be ready by the time the Stability Pact Regional Table and SEECF Foreign Ministers meet on May 10 in Zagreb, followed by final confirmation by the SEECF Prime Ministers on May 11.

¶2. (SBU) Early maneuvering on the RCC SG nomination has begun, with Croatian Foreign Ministry State Secretary Biscovic informally measuring support for his own candidacy. Former Serbia Foreign Minister Goran Svilanovic still lacks Belgrade's support for the nomination, although Special Coordinator Busek and European Commission officials reportedly will press the GOS to support him. Sarajevo remains the clear favorite for the secretariat location, with open support from Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Moldova thus far. On Kosovo, a strident Albanian FM Mustafaj blocked consensus in the FMs' joint statement, despite efforts to persuade him to accept language which fully reflected UNSCR 1244 and Contact Group Principles on Kosovo. Moldovan Foreign Minister Stratan announced Moldova's candidacy for SEECF CiO in mid-2008, following Bulgaria; Moldova's lack of a clear EU and NATO track, and its limited capacity for leading the RCC at its formative stage, will not bolster its bid. End summary and comment.

Agreement on the process

¶3. (U) The SEECF FM meeting officially launched the process of creating the new Regional Cooperation Council by establishing the methodology for nominating candidates for the SecGen and secretariat location. The Institutional Working Group (IWG), co-chaired by Stability Pact Deputy Special Coordinator Mozur and Croatian Ambassador Grigic representing the SEECF CiO, met on February 26 in Brussels to iron out the details on the SecGen mandate and the requirements and procedure for determining the site of the RCC secretariat. Subsequently, on February 28 in Zagreb, Grigic chaired

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the SEECF PolDir's discussion on the draft SG mandate and site requirements, initially presenting independent Croatian MFA texts but eventually accepting the IWG documents as the basis for discussion. With this shift in strategy, and with Biscovic in the chair the next day, the process proceeded smoothly and the PolDir's

produced texts for both issues that were fully consistent with IWG proposals and that were adopted without change by the FMs on March 12.

14. (U) RCC SecGen: The key points of the SecGen mandate include the need for the successful candidate to be a strong political figure, ideally with experience with regional cooperation, who is able to deal effectively with senior government officials "at the highest appropriate" level as well as with international financial institutions, donors, and private sector. Formal nominations should be submitted by March 31, with a three-week period of PolDir consultations with key donors to follow. PolDirs would then make a consolidated recommendation to Foreign Ministers by April 30, with FMs deciding the nomination on May 10 and PMs confirming the decision at their May 11 summit. The SecGen would serve an initial three-year term with a possible two-year extension. The European Commission reiterated its commitment to ensure an early start by the nominee by promising to fund a transitional SecGen contract for the months leading up to the formal establishment of the RCC secretariat, with the contract to start possibly as early as June,

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or a month after the May 11 SEECP Prime Ministers meeting in Zagreb.

15. (U) RCC Location: The basic parameters agreed were the logistical requirements for adequate modern office space for a staff of perhaps 20-25 people and an appropriate site agreement to give the secretariat legal personality in the hosting country. Given the

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clear difficulties in meeting Belgian laws and regulations for founding the proposed Brussels liaison office, the IWG will likely convene a legal working group to address the legal complexities inherent in both the regional and Brussels operations.

Unexpected Albanian Objection to Kosovo language

16. (U) Drafting the joint statement was on track until discussion addressed the Kosovo status issue. Albanian rep Lauka opened with a

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tough line, arguing that a short statement focused on the Ahtisaari process sufficed, or if UNSCR 1244 was to be cited, it needed to be accompanied by a language citing the majority will of the Kosovo people. Serbian PolDir Sahovic countered with an effort to cite the SEECP Charter's language of the inviolability of borders. After much discussion, a near consensus text evolved citing UNSCR 1244, Contact Group principles, the SEECP Charter, and the Ahtisaari process as the basis for Kosovo status discussions.

17. (SBU) At the FMs meeting, however, Albanian FM Mustafaj reiterated the tough line laid out the previous day, arguing that UNSCR 1244 was old, irrelevant history, which could only be mentioned if accompanied by language citing the determining role of the majority, will of the Kosovo people. Serbian FM Draskovic countered with his basic Kosovo speech, challenging the group on its responsibility for endangering the security of all in the region should Kosovo status be pursued at the cost of Serbian humiliation, which he claimed underlay Kosovar intentions. Croatian FM Grabar Kitarovic eventually offered Mustafaj the option of agreeing to let the text include a footnote indicating that all but one of the ten delegations had joined consensus on this point (article 9). Mustafaj agreed, to the clear disappointment of the other FMs. DSC Mozur spoke to Mustafaj afterwards and found him at ease with the outcome, although other participants remained perplexed by the Albanian position and logic, and disappointed that the SEECP joint statement did not have the region standing together.

Foreign Ministers react politely to Moldova's offer

18. (SBU) The FMs' tour de table speeches uniformly highlighted the good feeling surrounding the launch of the RCC and regional ownership process, and offered a venue for statements urging a

steady move ahead to resolve Kosovo status. Bulgarian Deputy Foreign Minister Kyuchukov staked out the principle that the first RCC SecGen should not be from an EU member country of the SEECP, and indicated that Bulgaria had decided not to submit a name. The request by Moldovan Foreign Minister Stratan to take the SEECP Cio lead after Bulgaria in May 2008 was politely acknowledged. (Note: Macedonia would appear to be a likely successor to Bulgaria given its turn in the SEECP's loose rotation, while some participants suggested privately that Serbia might step into the role, with Moldova coming a year later in 2009.)

BRADTKE